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Salvatore Rannazzisi
Global Network Architect

Organon Replaces Legacy IPSec VPN with F5's FirePass For Secure Remote Access; Uses BIG-IP Link Controller For ISP Load Balancing



Industry:

Health Care

Challenges:

- Needed to add new access gateways to the Internet
- Load balance between multiple ISPs
- Providing reliable remote access

Solution:

BIG-IP Link Controller and FirePass SSL VPN

Company Information:

- High availability through immediate ISP failover
- Improved user performance
- Reduced management and support
- Lower deployment and ongoing maintenance costs



Overview

Organon needed the best technology to ensure that their site traffic was directed over the best possible link and ISP while eliminating the deployment barriers and costs of multi-homing via Border Gateway Protocol. They also required a second solution that enabled their workers, partners and vendors working from home or on the road to gain secure remote access to corporate applications via standard web browser technology. F5's BIG-IP Link Controller and FirePass Controller, respectively, enabled Organon to dramatically reduce access, administrative, and support costs compared to previous solutions.

While BGP is a core technology for routing IP packets through the Internet, it wasn't well suited to match Organon's particular goals. BGP can be complex to troubleshoot, which often means having to contract with outside experts with extensive BGP skill sets. BGP also makes it difficult for businesses to control the traffic the way they want in order to best fit their needs.

“With BGP, just getting the ISPs to peer together was a nightmare. We definitely needed a simpler and more robust solution,” said Rannazzisi.

Challenge

Organon had two key challenges with its network. First, it needed to multihome their network connections - essentially bringing in a second pipe from another carrier. Multi-homing means that a site has more than one WAN link or access gateway to the Internet. This establishes another path for traffic to flow in and out of the data center in the event that one link fails.

A second company challenge revolved around providing remote access – that is, enabling Organon employees, vendors and partners on the road or working from home to easily and securely access the corporate network, using any type of device. Organon had a solution in place, but it constantly required maintenance and troubleshooting to make it work properly, especially since Organon clients had older operating systems on their PCs or laptops.

According to Salvatore Rannazzisi, Global Network Architect for Organon, the company not only needed to multi-home its site, it also needed to load balance between their multiple ISPs (Internet Service Providers) without having to rely on the complex Border Gateway Protocol (BGP).

“Just managing the clients – it was definitely no picnic,” said Rannazzisi.



Rannazzisi performed research on his own and also relied on research reports from Gartner and came up with two solutions to his network and access challenges – solutions from Application Traffic Management leader F5 Networks.

Solution

The BIG-IP Link Controller

First, in order to build a long-term multi-homing solution and to also address its traffic management issues, Organon chose the BIG-IP Link Controller from F5. The controller is an integrated load balancing product that replaces legacy routing protocols with faster, more flexible and intelligent switching technology.

Deployed between the firewalls and routers, the product regularly measures the health and capacity of each connection at a site. Bandwidth, performance and health of ISPs are automatically measured. Each user is then directed down the best possible and best performing link.

According to Rannazzisi, the BIG-IP Link Controller delivered immediate benefits, including:

- High availability to ensure users stayed connected through immediate ISP failover
- Improved performance by directing users across the fastest link to avoid congestion
- Reduced management and support by providing a greatly simplified multi-homing architecture

“I’m very happy with Link Controllers,” said Rannazzisi. “They’re very stable, solid, and they perform as I need them to do.”

Part of that performance revolves around ISP control and failover, which Link Controller helps to manage quickly, flawlessly and intelligently.

“

You can throw as many ISPs at the controllers as you want, and load balance across as many different ISPs as you need,” said Rannazzisi. “For example, AT&T might have a special on their T1 line, and I’ll go with them to save money. You’re not married to one ISP. And if one should go under, you’re fine. Nobody else even knows because of the failover. It’s great.”

Both FirePass and BIG-IP Link Controller are extremely reliable, something that greatly impressed Rannazzisi – and something that was very welcome given the limited size of the IT team.

“We have a lot of users on this campus and another campus, yet there are only two network engineers here,” said Rannazzisi. “We manage everything, including firewalls, approximately 54 switches and routers, and so on. There’s often not enough time for us, which is why F5 products are so nice. The Link Controllers, for example, have already been up hundreds of days already and I’ve never had to touch them. There hasn’t been a single problem. I trust them to work.”

That trust, Rannazzisi said, led him to allow F5 engineers full access to his Link Controller devices. “The only organization I’ve ever let into any of our devices – there’s actually an F5 account on our Link Controllers – is F5. I’ve never once let anyone else into our equipment. That’s something pretty special.”

F5 FirePass Secure Remote Access

Organon also relies on F5’s FirePass Controller, which provides secure remote access to corporate applications and data via standard web browser technology. It enables Organon to extend secure remote access to anyone connected to the Internet using desktops, laptops, PDAs, kiosks and more – while eliminating the need for complex IPsec VPNs.

It’s also the first SSL VPN solution with complete cross-platform

support. Extending its support for any IP application to Apple® Macintosh®, PocketPC and Linux clients, in addition to Microsoft® Windows®, and expanding client and application security for Web, email and file application access, FirePass delivers the industry’s most ubiquitous solution for secure application access.

FirePass offered several key features that enabled Organon to effectively gain secure remote access to their corporate files, email and data, including:

- **A dynamic policy engine** – a rules-based engine that authenticates users, authorizes access and applies client security policies based on the user and device being used for remote access.
- **Dynamic, simplified and scalable management** – enables Organon to easily manage access policies for a large and growing number of resources and users.
- **End-to-end security** – support for unified end-point security and integrated application layer security protects business applications and enterprise networks from worms and viruses. Ensures no confidential information is left behind on the client device.
- **Reduced cost** – with no pre-installed client software and with streamlined administration, the FirePass Controller lowers deployment and ongoing maintenance costs.

For Organon, overcoming the remote access and administrative challenges they’d faced previously with their IPsec VPN product was a major concern.

“Remote access used to be such a pain in the neck,” Rannazzisi quipped. “People couldn’t get in, couldn’t gain access. Everyday it seemed like I had ‘trouble tickets’ in



regard to remote access problems. We spent a lot of time on those trouble tickets for remote access. The number of those cases has dropped dramatically since we brought in FirePass.”

Rannazzisi and another network engineer replaced their current IPsec VPN solution with two FirePass SSL VPN devices (one for failover) and had them up and running over a weekend. The response from Company employees was immediate.

“Everybody in the organization loves it – from the clinical research department, to quality assurance, HR, IS – all over the company. Anyone working from home or on the road can now gain access to the intranet, email, any application. Or we can allow outside consultants to access ERP applications. It’s been really good to us.”

“The beautiful part about it,” continued Rannazzisi, “is that we have it registered in our public DNS, so people can just go to the web and access our network from anywhere.”

But according to Rannazzisi, access is nothing without the ability to administer who is allowed access to certain areas of the site.

“That was important to us. With FirePass, we can grant rights on the directory level or application level, by user name and password. Or we can limit access to certain people, like consultants, and then track everything they do on the terminal server. I think that’s great.”

And in terms of administration of the boxes themselves, Rannazzisi appreciates the hands-off approach he receives with FirePass.

“The ease of management and the reliability is very good. The FirePass boxes have been running flawlessly for about a year now. They literally haven’t been touched, except to add users, in a long, long time. And as I mentioned, their initial setup is quick and easy.”

With a 500 user license in place, FirePass is ready to grow with the Organon organization well into the future.

“You start poking around with it and it’s just amazing – it does so much. I think we’re using only about 10% of what it can do,” said Rannazzisi. “But within the next year I’m hoping our entire U.S. operations will be utilizing the SSL VPN. I showed it (FirePass) to the European team as well. I fully expect it to be the de facto standard for the entire company. Especially when more people start to use it.”

Finally, the service of the organization behind the FirePass product, F5 Networks, impressed Rannazzisi.

“Everybody at F5 has been very, very cool,” he said. “And that really makes a big difference. No matter whom you call, whatever time day or night, you get somebody on the phone, and they answer every question.”

Rannazzisi added, “Organon is a great company that I really enjoy working for. And to have these products and the support of F5 behind those products makes my job that much better.”

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